

The Thirties

going on at a particular time; in newspapers and advertisements, in clothes and in gestures, in tricks of speech, cigarette pictures, styles of hairdressing, and ministerial appointments; most obviously in whatever is immediately popular.

Popularity is achieved by making manifest the contemporary mood, as Lord Northcliffe well understood when he made an immediate success of the *Daily Mail* by setting out to give the public what they wanted, rather than what they ought to want, or what would be good for them. Since then others have copied his prescription, and as so often happens, outdone its original application;¹⁰ and the *Daily Mail* has come to have a distinctly old-fashioned flavour.

The contemporary mood touches everything and everyone, like the light of the declining sun spreading the same glow over faces, houses, trees, motor-cars, slag-heaps and pylons. It may be seen in hikers noisily making for the countryside, their knees bare, males and females scarcely distinguishable; in road-houses, strangely named (the Monkey Puzzle, the Spider's Web), urban to the country, rural to the town; in beauty-treatment, much developed, filling whole newspaper pages, inquiries being invited and profusely received, women's page editors (not always women) ruefully surveying a mountain of letters all asking for advice about intractable complexions, pores, armpits, eye-brows.

From Eton-crop to permanent wave covers the same distance as from Ramsay MacDonald to Mr. Neville Chamberlain, or from D. H. Lawrence to Mr. Hemingway, or from Charlie Chaplin to Walt Disney, or from Mr. Beverley

Nichols, cottager,
to Mr. Beverley Nichols, patriot. This author is
notably susceptible to the contemporary mood's fluctuations.
Its slightest
shift in direction or abatement of intensity is
registered by him.
In 1930, he was still praising the delights of rural
retirement; in

¹⁰ According to the *Report on the British Press* published in
April 1938 by
P.E.P. (Political and Economic Planning), the circulation of
the *Daily Mail*
in 1930 was 1,845,000, with the *Daily Express* 1,693,000 and
the *Daily Herald*
1,082,000; by 1937 it had fallen to 1,580,000, with the *Daily*
Herald and the
Daily Express both over 2,000,000,